

SB 1035: An Act Concerning Workplace Bullying

Thank you for your time and consideration. My name is Carrie Carlson and I was bullied at work. Knowing now that what I experienced was, in fact, bullying makes me feel like a child on the surface: underneath it makes me feel helpless, alone, confused, angry, depressed, anxious and sometimes lifeless.

It's taken me over a year to say that I was bullied and abused in the workplace. I didn't think it was actually a term used to describe actions taken against one adult by another. I thought it was a term used by children on the playground during recess. I knew something had happened to me however, I didn't know what to call it and there was nothing else to call it but, bullying.

I worked at a firm for five years as an operations assistant and then added the title intake coordinator to my position. Doing several jobs there was stressful but, fulfilling. There were layoffs and budget cuts during the recession and I stepped up and would learn whatever needed to be learned and took on extra work to help the organization save money and keep jobs including my own. I loved my job. I loved helping people.

The last incident that transpired between my boss and I was the incident that gave me an instant anxiety attack and left me cowering in the bathroom hyperventilating and alone. It also, gave me PTSD.

I quit my job two and half weeks after my boss told me to send an email she had penned instructing three attorneys, my superiors, on how to handle a client who did not want representation from a specific attorney any longer. After, saying to her verbatim: I don't feel comfortable sending that. She lunged forward, tore the written pages from the legal pad, crumbled them and threw them in the trash. She then retrieved them and as she stood in the doorway twisting the papers she screamed "If you f***** know best. Send what you think..." Then I got tunnel vision, stood up from my desk chair and walked passed her to the bathroom where I remained for over an hour, crying, shaking and just repeating what do I do.

After the hour I called my Business Manager, who coincidentally is my aunt. She let me back into the locked offices where I retrieved my coat and purse and told her I was leaving for the remainder of the day due to an exchange earlier with the boss. I began to cry again and just said over and over: she went crazy. I knew this wasn't PC but, at the time that's all I could get out. I went to my car where the Business Manager/Aunt came out to check on me. She handed me a Hallmark-type card from my boss. I didn't open it. I knew it was an apology card. I had received cards like this before for prior incidents and, emails and other forms of empty apologies. I say empty because when someone apologizes they mean they are sorry AND say they will try not to do it again. But, it always happened again and again. I was her target. Her own proverbial punching bag.

A week after this incident, I saw a lawyer who explained to me there were no laws in existence that prevented this tyrant from terrorizing me. I couldn't file a harassment suit. I was not a part of a protected class. At the time, a 27 year old, white, female with a master's degree and 2 cats. I was not entitled to unemployment even though I filed, was denied and appealed with a hearing explaining the extenuating circumstances. I filed a grievance with the Legal Director and according to personnel policy because I didn't feel "physically threatened" my grievance was never even seen by the board of directors.

Once receiving the response that no further action against my Executive Director would be taken I tendered my resignation effective immediately citing I could no longer work there for mental health reasons. The organization being under 20 people it would be impossible to go work and not see her or have direct contact with her. All decisions and everything were approved by her. I had no other choice. There was no choice.

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This wasn't the first instance of her abuse. I had been ill 2 years prior after a vacation to the Dominican Republic to celebrate a family members 99th birthday. I had contracted MRSA (Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*) which left me with excruciating boils all over my body. While at home being treated for anti-biotic resistant staph infection she e-mailed the staff to tell them "Carrie has MRSA again!" this was in the subject line of the e-mail with body. Upon my return to work a week later I was ostracized by the staff. Staff asked if I was contagious and should I be back at work. If they could catch it and everyone was on Google looking up my medical condition. Besides feeling sick because I had boils all over my body and being on medication called Bactrim which makes you feel like you have the flu I dealt with 20 people wondering if I was going to make them sick. Not to mention trying to do my job. No law exists stating this can't happen. She can realize my medical information because she is not my healthcare provider. This is a form of abuse. I suffered because of this. I wanted to die more so than I already did. The MRSA was burning, riving pain and going into work was like having someone poke you with an andiron in the mind. Because she choose words as her method of torture and there was never any physical contact I had no recourse. However, there were physical symptoms that I experienced. I was depressed and anxious. I physically had to go to the doctor and physically go to the pharmacy and physically have to start taking medications to stop from hurting myself.

When I first started there I had suggested a change in the time cards because she was concerned about staff not putting in the correct time when coming into work. When I submitted my changes she began calling me 'Sarge', which at first I thought was funny. Coming from a strict business management background I thought she great likes me. She gave me a nickname. But, as time progressed I realized quickly it was not a term of endearment. It was a name with malice behind it. It was her way of letting me know I was not in charge. I was not to step out of line. She would be making the calls and any one adverse to that would not be accepted.

There are so many more examples of how this person abused and bullied me at work but, if I told you it would seem as if I am whining. With bullying in the workplace it is slow, it's health harming activity over a period of time.

It's over a year later and I still have nightmares that I have to go back to work with my former boss. I couldn't bring myself to apply for job in an office for fear I would have another boss who was abusive to me. I was nannying for a family in the town next to me but, I told them I was looking for a new job with benefits and they found a new nanny. So, right now I unemployed with no source of income. All of my student loans are behind, my bills behind, my checking account is overdrawn on any given day. I owe money to everyone and I have blown through my savings and retirement.

The model Healthy Workplace Bill by David Yamada would protect me if you enact that. SB 1035, as now written, would not protect me or offer me a remedy. I have to oppose SB 1035, unless it is amended to be the Healthy Workplace Bill. I was not a state employee when this happened. When a Healthy Workplace Bill is passed, the law will have a remedy for targets like me. If the HWB was passed I could have sued my ex-boss and continued to live financially okay. As for mentally, I may have not had my anti-depression medication increased on the anniversary of leaving my job this past year. I wouldn't have spent Thanksgiving in my pajamas just praying for it to be over. It is fair and balanced between the employee and the employer. There are no tax implications for tax payers like there are now. Right now, the state pays for my medical coverage because I am unemployed. I am able to work. I have a lot of medical expenses because of my depression/bi-polar. Ask the taxpayers if they are done paying for me?

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